

January 30, 2011

And now for something completely different ...

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Monty Python is famous for suddenly changing the topic and introducing us to the bizarre - "*And now for something completely different ...*" this morning I would like us to think about "church" - but not in traditional, stale, stuffy ways. "*And now for something completely different ...*"

In a world of social networking, where people connect to give them an advantage in their career, to be more productive and successful, to find a significant relationship, and who knows what else. We connect with our friends, our family, professional colleagues, potential employers ... "*And now for something completely different ...*" The church.

Most churches are rather unlikely groups of people! They are not graduates of the same school. They are not in the same profession. They are not always similar in their political perspectives. They are inter-racial, inter-generational, multi-cultural, economically and politically diverse communities of people. Under ordinary circumstances few of us would ever meet, let alone choose to spend a couple of hours with each other on a weekly basis! Why bother? Why do we do it? What is "church" all about? This morning we're beginning a series of studies in 1 Corinthians which focuses on just this: what - or who - is a church!

What is a church?

Is it a building? Is it a worship service? Is it an organization we join? An institution? A club? A service organization where we care for one another and help in the community?

What does the Bible say? The church is not a building - churches meet in buildings (like ours), homes, schools (the Corinth church met in the home of Titius Justus). The church is not the service - worship is part of the church's life, but not all of it. The church is not a club, although it is a community and a family. The church is not a social service organization, although it cares for people in need. The church is not even a mission, although mission is a key component does.

In the Bible, the church is people - special people. Paul addresses his letter to the church in Corinth. He writes to the church, "*those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy ... who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1:2).

1. The church is people who are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*" - we believe that Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, has saved us from our sin; we are forgiven people; made new through the gift of God.

- a. *We are in a new relationship with God.* In the Old Testament, most people

understood God primarily as rather distant, intimidating, and hard to relate to. He was "Lord Almighty," "Lord of Hosts," "King of Kings." All wonderful - and true - understandings of God. But hard for us to relate to. And now for something completely different ... with the coming of Jesus:

- i. we are God's "*children*" - "*sons and daughters*" of our Heavenly Father (e.g. Matthew 5:45, John 1:12-13, Romans 8:14-21, etc.). What does that kind of a relationship look like?
 - ii. We are Jesus' "*friends*" (John 15:13-15). What does that kind of a relationship look like?
- b. ***We are new creations*** - We are something completely different! The consistent picture is that, as people with a relationship with Jesus, we are radically different from who we were before we knew Him (or who we might be if we didn't know Him now). The old person is dead and gone; we are made new through the Holy Spirit. The Bible uses a variety of metaphors to describe this - "*born again*" (John 3:3), "*made new*" (Ephesians 4:23), "*clothed with Christ*" (Galatians 3:26).

Paul writes, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God ... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*" (Colossians 3:1-10) Which leads us to Paul's next comment to the Corinthians ...

2. **The church is people who are "*called to be holy*."** God saves us. But He also calls us. He invites us. He challenges us. He asks us to think of the implications of our relationship with Jesus and our salvation. You never want to dishonour your friend, your Father, or One whom you love. Because you love him, you also trust His wisdom is best for you. So, we live lives that show that we are "sanctified" - saved, redeemed, forgiven, renewed by Jesus. In one talk, Jesus says three times, "*If you love me, keep my commands*" (John 14:15, 21, 23). "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,*" says Paul ... "*Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the*

message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”(Colossians 3:12-17) That is something completely different!

3. We “call on the name” of our Lord Jesus Christ

- a. *We call on Him* - When life is a struggle - we call on Him. When life is a dream - we call on Him. When we need wisdom - we call on Him. When we need guidance - we call on Him. When we are celebrating - we call on Him. Elsewhere Paul refers to this as “praying continually” - recognizing that wherever we are, whatever we’re doing, whatever our circumstances, regardless of our situation, we place our lives in God’s hands, we trust in Him, we seek His counsel, we follow His way.
- b. *We call Him “Lord”*- we place ourselves under His authority. This something completely different! We are so used to thinking of our lives in terms of *my* dreams, *my* goals, *my* future, *my* like and dislikes, *my* stuff, *my* this and *my* that. What if it’s not about *me*? What if it not about who has the most toys - the biggest house, the nicest car, the best vacations - when he dies.

What if life is really about the true Lord of Lords and King of Kings. It’s about our loving heavenly Father. It’s about our Saviour, friend, and brother, Jesus. It’s about our Wonderful Counsellor, the Holy Spirit. And so we think about our lives in terms of how they can bring glory to Him ... in terms of how we can serve Him ... in terms of how our lives can matter in terms of what really matters (what does really matter?)

What if we are not captains of our own ships, masters of our own destinies, lords of our own lives? What if we seek to align ourselves with what He is doing in our community and in the world? What if we desire to see how we can use our gifts, talents, abilities, resources, and blessings to build His Kingdom? What if we seek to know His will ... and actually do it? What does mean that Jesus is our Lord in terms of our identity? Our purpose? Our day to day living?

The church is people - God’s people, saved by Jesus, called to holy living, called to know and serve Him as Lord That relationship with Jesus defines who we are, what we are to do with our lives, and how we live our lives. And that is something completely different.

It's not who you are yet, but who God sees you can be ...

In 1:4, Paul thanks God for the church. He goes on to list several qualities of the church in

Corinth for which he is thankful:

- for what they know and say (1:5);
- for their spiritual gifts (1:7);
- for their strength (1:8); and
- for the fact that they are blameless (1:8).

Now I hate to be the one to share the bad news, but this was not really such a wonderful church! Although Paul is thankful for what they know and say, it's also a church riddled with gossip and hearsay. Although Paul is thankful for their spiritual blessings they are using them all wrong and are very stingy! Paul praises their strength but spends lots of energy talking about serious rifts and divisions in the church. This church is far from being "blameless!"

What Paul focuses on at the very beginning of this letter is that the church exists and has any blessings at all only because of the grace of Jesus Christ (1:4). Paul is thankful above all that, despite the church's problems, Jesus Christ is its heart and soul. Yes, it has problems! But thank God it even exists! That's a miracle! And Paul sees God's potential for this church ...

Some of us - every now and then - grumble and complain about our church! Despite all the wonderful talk of being "sanctified" and "holy" we are not perfect. People are so ... whatever! There is gossip and hearsay. We aren't as spiritually alive as we could be. We may feel some people may be stingy with their time, help, or finances. There may be divisions. We're in good company with the church at Corinth!

If a church is people, that every church is going to be less than perfect! But it is a miracle that this church even exists, isn't it? It's a miracle that we ever came together, isn't it? That's a tremendous testimony to the power of God at work in our world! God looks at us and sees the potential - we do not lack ANY spiritual gifts (1:7); He will keep us strong (1:8); even though we stumble and fail, He forgives us and will hold us blameless (1:8). We are a work in progress ... God is faithful - He will build His church in us and through us (maybe even despite us!)

We are the people of Jesus Christ. That's what - who - a church is! We have been sanctified by his death on the cross. We are called to be Jesus' holy people. It is a miracle this church exists! It is a miracle we believe! It's a miracle God does things through us! And His promise is that His power is at work within us. He will build his church. His greatest desire is to work with us to share His love with a hurting, lost, confused, desperate world. Let us commit ourselves to prayer! Let us commit ourselves to love one another. Let us pray for opportunities to share our lives with others. But most importantly, let us commit ourselves to Jesus Christ!

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